



Delivering for the North

February 2025

Introduction

The North is leading the way in using the powers and levers of devolution to drive growth and improve the lives of people across our region. We can already see this in action across a range of interventions, from trade and investment collaboration to bus re-regulation, and pan-Northern programmes to grow the creative industries. In the run-up to the 2025 Convention of the North, it's clear that the region has a twin-track opportunity to help the new UK Government deliver against its growth objectives, based on the North's specific opportunities and challenges.

- The North can **deliver growth at scale** to support the national mission of increasing living standards across all regions of the UK. We can do this through a Northern model of growth that combines investment in our sector growth opportunities, with investment in infrastructure and in our people.
- The North faces serious, long-running challenges to unlocking the potential of its people, held back by poverty, inequality, and health challenges. By **investing in prevention and in the North's people**, we can both drive growth and improve the lives of our residents.

To make the most of this opportunity, Northern Mayors and leaders, as well as our growth partners, have agreed to prioritise resources and capacity in the areas where there is the greatest opportunity to add value to the ongoing work of Northern places, communities and businesses:

Twin-track opportunity	Pan-Northern Delivery Priorities				
The North meeting the national Growth Mission	Trade and Investment	Transport	Net Zero	Place and Culture	Innovation
Meeting the inclusion challenge in the North	Skills and Healthy Work				

This paper therefore brings together key policy priorities and prospective commitments from across these priority areas. These are excerpts; the full Convention policy papers themselves will include additional context on Northern progress against these policy objectives, alignment with national government, and links between policy papers and other thematic areas, in particular with the Skills and Healthy Work agenda.

The proposals included within these drafts have been developed collectively by working groups consisting of local and Strategic Authority officials and key Northern partners. **They are still in an early stage of development**, and we are keen to understand how they can be improved or adjusted in line with the priorities of key Northern partners. The Convention itself will also be a key opportunity to debate, refine, and co-create these proposals

In line with the action-oriented approach of this year's Convention, the range of policy proposals are grouped by potential routes to delivery, whether this is through pan-Northern collaboration between Northern places, through collective advocacy for greater devolution, or through partnership with institutions and the private sector.

The 2025 Convention in Preston

On the 27th and 28th of February in Preston, the Convention of the North meets to debate and agree our collective priorities for delivering on the potential of the North's economy and people.

Since the establishment of the Convention in 2018, we have gathered in Gateshead, Liverpool, Rotherham, Manchester, Leeds, and now Preston. In that time, the Convention has grown and matured, not just as an annual event, but as an institution and a powerful voice for the North as a whole.

At the 2024 Convention in Leeds, leaders from Northern institutions, businesses, and civic society assembled to debate the policy opportunities and barriers faced by our region. It was the first to take place across two days, making it the most extensive and collaborative to date. The intention behind this was to ensure delegates attending from across the North had the opportunity to co-create our collective priorities, through a series of workshops. The outcome of this was [a Manifesto that sets out the North's ambitions to the new government, collectively built by Northern policy experts, leaders, businesses, and young people.](#)

The Manifesto showcased the North's strong partnerships with business, universities, science, and civic and voluntary sector organisations. This collaboration is reflected in the cross-party and cross-sector partnerships that have shaped the North's priorities and work. It includes Mayoral Combined Authorities, Local Authorities, the former NP11 partnership, the N8 group of research-intensive universities, Transport for the North, the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, the People's Powerhouse, the Northern Health Science Alliance, and ongoing pan-Northern collaborations such as Nature North and the Northern Place and Culture Partnership.

Following the Convention, Northern leaders and mayors met in York in September 2024, to review options to take forward the Northern programme of work and to launch the Manifesto. During the summit, they outlined some of the next steps needed to take forward the policy programme outlined, which in turn informed the proposed approach for policy development ahead of Convention 2025.

The Convention is being hosted in Preston, by Lancashire County Council, with the support of the University of Central Lancashire. It will showcase the brilliant work currently underway, highlight strategic investment opportunities, and celebrate the recent achievements both within Lancashire and across the North. But most importantly, it will **set the stage for the North to agree tangible plans for pan-regional collaboration and delivery** on our key growth priorities.

The North at a glance

Our Principles

A strong sense of Identity



A Positive Vision



Actions, Not Just Words



Partnership: Working Together



Devolution of Power



Our Place

80 towns (and 4420 settlements)

33% of England's forests

31 Higher Education institutions

18 cities

11 National Parks/Landscapes

Our Economy

£371bn annual GVA

£98.4bn exports

1.1m businesses

50.7% of England's renewable energy

Our People

15.3m residents

7.8m women

7.5m men

3.5m children

1m students

Our Culture

68,693 listed buildings

1064 libraries

345 museums

317 Registered parks/gardens

6 World Heritage sites

Our Assets

Proud People



Phenomenal Natural Assets



Distinct Economic Strengths



Connecting the Union



A Unique Capacity to deliver

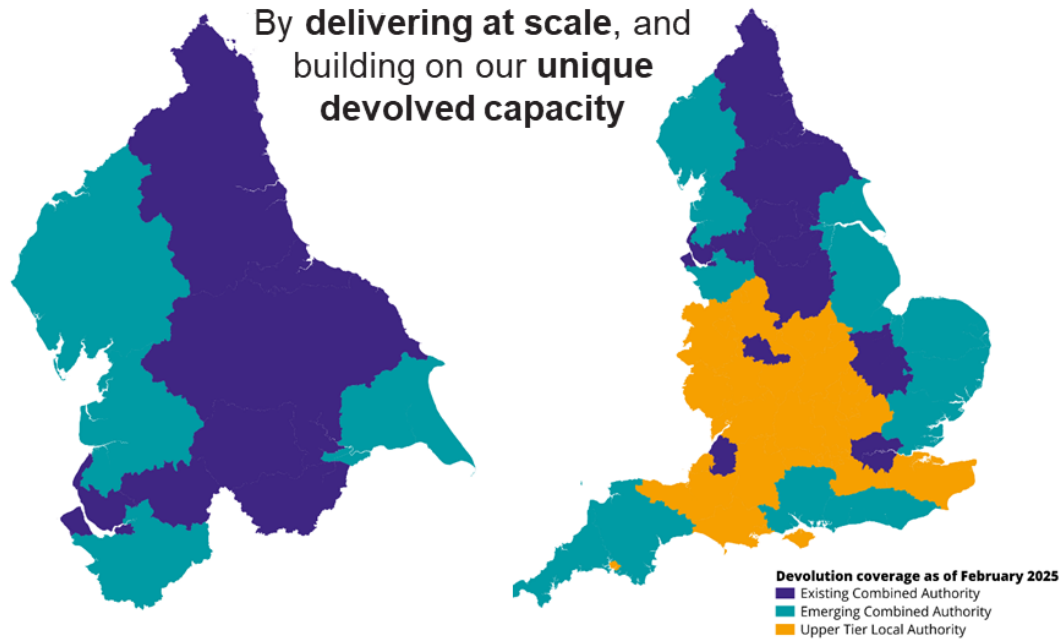









Delivering growth for the UK

We can grow our economy
by £118bn a year by 2050

By investing in **technology and innovation**, improving
infrastructure and development supply, investing in
Net Zero, and investing in **skills, health and prevention**
- The Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review Refresh, 2023



And through our five gamechangers:

- 1** Connecting the North through a transformed rail system 
- 2** Making the North a global leader in Clean Energy investment 
- 3** Creating a Northern cluster of AI excellence 
- 4** Combining cutting edge Northern research with place-based prevention of ill-health to drive growth and reform 
- 5** Investing in the North's Place, Cultural and Natural assets 

The opportunity for Convention 2025

Since the publication of the Manifesto for the North, we have seen a new Government elected, with a mandate for change and an agenda based around the new national missions, including growing the economy for all people in all regions, making the UK a clean energy superpower, and breaking down barriers to opportunity, among others.

The North will be an essential partner in delivering against these objectives, and the Convention will take place at a key time to influence, deliver, and drive forward the policy agenda of the new Government, as the timeline below demonstrates.

Figure 1: Timeline of key recent Government policy announcements

	Date	Policy
Announced	July 2024	Great British Energy Bill introduced
	July 2024	Strategic Defence Review begun
	October 2024	National Wealth Fund launched
	October 2024	Autumn Budget announced
	November 2024	Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act passed
	November 2024	Great Britain Working White Paper published
	December 2024	Revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published
	December 2024	English Devolution White Paper published
	December 2024	Clean Power 2030 Action Plan published
	January 2024	National Infrastructure Strategy draft published and Chancellor's speech on growth.
	February 2025	The Convention of the North to be held in Preston
Expected	March 2025	Planning and Infrastructure Bill to be introduced
	Spring 2025	National Transport Strategy to be published
	June 2025	Full UK Industrial Strategy to be published, following the Green Paper
	Summer 2025	Comprehensive Spending Review to be published

The North's potential to deliver

The North now has a clear opportunity to lead the way in development of a new model of pan-regional collaboration. The North is well placed to do so because, as set out in the [2024 Manifesto for the North](#), the North has **three key assets** that will put it at the centre of delivery against national missions:

- **The North's Economic Potential.** The North has the economic potential to power the UK's future economy, leading on digital technologies, renewable energy, and artificial intelligence and automation
- **The North's Scale.** The North has the scale to make a significant impact on national priorities and missions.
- **The North's Capacity.** The North has unique institutional and organisational capacity through devolution to deliver our shared ambitions with Government.

This opportunity has explicitly been recognised by the new Government and the emerging policy programme is intended to capitalise on this opportunity for the North to lead. The **English Devolution White Paper** set out plans for a new tier of Strategic Authorities, building on the mayoral model pioneered by and within the North. Demonstrating the maturity of the North's devolved institutions, five out of the six Established Strategic Authorities that will gain flexible control over local spending through the new Integrated Settlement model are located in the North.

The North benefits from clear governance and leadership structures. Recent local government reorganisations and devolution deals – such as those in North Yorkshire, Cumbria, Lancashire, and Hull and East Yorkshire – have ensured that the entire North will be governed by a devolved Strategic Authority. The North is now well positioned to show the path to delivering against national goals.

Devolution and collaboration have allowed the North to make great strides, from closer strategic co-operation on shared topics like trade and investment, to path-breaking reforms like bus franchising, the launch of pan-Northern programmes like One Creative North, and the recent Mayoral Innovation Exchange hosted by South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority.

The English Devolution White Paper committed the Government to supporting the potential of the Great North Mayoral-led partnership, in convening public and private sector partners, developing investable propositions, and co-ordinating the scaling up of cultural activities:

[Regional partnerships could] convene regional public and private sector partners to promote a region internationally, develop investable propositions in key sectors and align trade, investment, major infrastructure and land use issues. Such bodies could also coordinate major cultural and sporting activities, recognising the opportunity to scale up across wider areas – The English Devolution White Paper, 2024

This aligns closely with the areas in which the North has already taken proactive policy leadership across the years of the Convention of the North. The North now has the opportunity to put this partnership onto a firmer footing and to lead the way in pioneering a new model of pan-regional collaboration, just as Northern places led the way in the development of stronger models of collaboration between local authorities to create Combined Authorities.

Building a Northern Growth Model

The North has a twin-track opportunity to help the UK Government deliver against its missions, especially the growth one, based on the specific opportunities and challenges within the region.

- **Delivering growth at scale** through investment in our key sectoral assets, which represent the future growth potential of the UK economy, including Clean Energy; AI and our digital sector; advanced manufacturing; and health innovation.
- **Investing in infrastructure and in prevention**, to unlock the potential of our people, held back by poverty, inequality and health challenges, closing the productivity gap and improving life chances

The North helping to meet the national Growth Mission

The North can unleash economic growth to support the national growth mission. In doing so, it benefits from a strong base of governance and delivery capacity, and a history of partnership unrivalled elsewhere in the UK. Building on years of pan-Northern collaboration and policy development, there are specific opportunities where it makes sense to collaborate at the Northern level in enabling growth:

- **Trade and Investment.** In a rapidly growing world where economic development is increasingly driven at the level of tens of millions, the North has the right scale to compete internationally. Through closer collaboration on Trade and Investment, Northern places can benefit from the benefits of scale, alignment and the development of a genuine pipeline of investable propositions, informed by a close and detailed understanding of the needs and opportunities of the North in a changing global marketplace.
- **Net Zero.** Due to the North's scale, energy expertise, and plentiful natural resources, the North will be an essential delivery partner for the net zero transition and the accompanying mission of making the UK a Clean Energy Superpower. In the aftermath of the energy-driven cost of living crisis, now more than ever, that mission will be foundational to growth, international competitiveness, and raising living standards. Our key projects at scale, cross-border collaboration and co-ordination across the North can help to deliver this potential.
- **Transport.** Transport is the key enabler of connection between people, communities and businesses, but the North of England has been held back for far too long by inadequate, ageing, and uncoordinated infrastructure. By improving links within and between Northern places, improved transport can help Northern places drive economic growth, while unlocking economic opportunity and social benefit for our people.
- **Innovation.** Innovative activity doesn't recognise administrative boundaries, and the links between the clusters, assets and people that drive the North's capacity to innovate stretch across the breadth of our region and beyond. The North can collectively work to support high-value, innovation-led growth through fostering collaboration between our places, education institutions and innovative firms.
- **Place and Culture.** Building on the distinctive strengths and brands of individual Northern places, and the potential to deploy natural and cultural assets, there is additional added value in co-operation to strengthen the North as an internationally significant cultural powerhouse, and to develop a cohesive offer across our rural and urban places.

These thematic areas have been the focus of pan-Northern co-operation and policy development over the years. The draft actions and interventions required to support growth, where real value is added at the Northern level, are outlined further below in the draft policy programme.

Meeting the Inclusive Growth challenge in the North

The North presents a huge economic opportunity. But our people also face huge challenges, not least those around inequality, child poverty, and economic inactivity. This has been exacerbated by austerity, Covid, and underinvestment in services and in community and preventative support. Turning the tide on this through inclusive investment in the North's people – in their skills, health and work – is essential to meeting the productivity challenge and supporting growth.

The North is already leading the way in key areas. From the Livewell Programme of reforming public services in Greater Manchester, to the groundbreaking triple helix health partnerships driven through the new Lancaster Health Innovation Campus, and the work of the Child Poverty Commission in the North East, Northern places are making positive strides and already visibly delivering for our people. But we need to go further and faster to reverse the challenging socio-economic trends that are holding back our residents; the role of Government as a partner in doing so will be crucial. A recent paper by the **Northern Powerhouse Partnership** [highlighted the potential for prevention-led revenue interventions](#) to help the North to move towards net contributions to the exchequer, by reducing the pressure on public service spending.

The size of the prize for a Northern Growth Model

The scale of this opportunity was highlighted in the 2023 refresh of the [Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review](#), which reviewed the potential to boost long-term growth in the North across four policy and investment levers: investing in **technology and innovation**, improving **infrastructure and development supply**, investing in **Net Zero**, and investing in **skills, health and prevention** as part of an inclusive productivity programme.

Extensive modelling shows that if all these investment levers were deployed together, the outcome is a transformational scenario for the North, **growing the economy by an additional £118bn a year by 2050**. This represents the impact of closing the £1,500 per capita gap in public funding that exists between the North and elsewhere and would allow us to halve the productivity gap with the rest of the UK.

Achieving this transformative scenario across all four levers would also have powerful additional benefits across a range of key policy outcomes by 2050, including an **increase in life expectancy of up to 4.4 years**, an **increase of £18.5bn in R&D investment**, and a **reduction of carbon emissions by 75.1m tonnes**.

Our 'Gamechanger' policy propositions

Ahead of the Comprehensive Spending Review and with Government now putting in place the institutional architecture for policy delivery over the current parliament, there is a key opportunity to galvanise growth through targeted investment opportunities across the North. These propositions are complementary to the wider policy programme of the North, which the North will continue to develop and shape in partnership. **They are outlined in more depth in Annex II.**

Four of these gamechangers are closely linked with the Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review, while the fifth gamechanger builds on the strength of existing Northern collaboration and partnerships like One Creative North, Place and Culture North, and Nature North.

Fig 2. Our Gamechanger Propositions

	<p>Connecting the North through a transformed rail system, by completing the delivery of the Transpennine Route Upgrade, delivering Northern Powerhouse Rail as a co-ordinated programme of investment with benefits all the way across the North, and securing improved capacity and connectivity increases north of Birmingham.</p>
	<p>Making the North a global leader in Clean Energy investment, by co-development of a Net Zero Trade and Investment Prospectus with Government, co-investment with GB Energy in key Northern energy opportunities, and building a Clean Energy market that works for Northern businesses and people by rolling out locational pricing.</p>
	<p>Creating a Northern cluster of AI excellence, by co-ordinating partners for simplified points of entry for inward investment, developing new skills and upskilling the existing workforce through Northern universities, working in triple helix partnerships to embed AI usage in industry, and deepening collaboration between our research centres to form a region-wide cluster of excellence.</p>
	<p>Combining cutting edge Northern research with place-based prevention of ill-health to drive growth and reform, by establishing the NHSA Institute for Preventative Health Research in the North, and enabling Strategic Authorities to pioneer new integrated approaches to employment support, housing and health through further devolution.</p>
	<p>Investing in the North's Place, Cultural and Natural assets, by co-investment in the Place and Culture North Initiative, delivering the Investing in Nature for the North proposition, and supporting the jewel-in-the-crown One Creative North initiative.</p>

The Convention policy development programme

This section highlights a series of draft policy propositions, intended for discussion and prioritisation at the Convention, which will form the basis for pan-Northern co-operation. Unlike the gamechangers, these are designed to focus on activities that the North can deliver in partnership between places, with Government, and with the private sector, Northern institutions and our communities.

The Convention policy development process

In the months after the 2024 Convention of the North, the draft [Manifesto for the North](#) was refined following the input of Convention attendees, and then shared with party leaders privately ahead of the general election. This Manifesto now represents the basis of a joint Northern work programme, which will be taken forward through the 2025 Convention of the North. It has been agreed that this year's Convention will focus on delivering this approach.

The aims and objectives of the 2025 Convention policy development programme have therefore been:

- To develop a Northern policy programme in the areas where we have agreed there is additional benefit through collaboration; **Transport, Net Zero, Trade and Investment, Innovation, Place and Culture** and the cross-cutting theme of **Skills and Healthy Work**.
- To take forward the **policy priorities agreed through the Manifesto of the North**
- To inform and support discussion and iteration of outputs at the Convention workshops.

This process has been taken forward by the Convention Policy Officers Group, with co-ordination support from the staff resource formerly constituting the NP11 and now deployed to support the Convention Steering Group, and from Metro Dynamics, the policy curator for the Convention.

The Draft Papers

This paper brings together key policy priorities (based on those included in the Manifesto for the North) and prospective commitments from across the five policy priority areas. The papers themselves will include additional context on Northern progress against these policy objectives, alignment with national government, and links between policy papers and other thematic areas, in particular with the Skills and Healthy Work agenda.

Proposals included within these drafts have been collectively developed by working groups consisting of local and Strategic Authority officials and key Northern partners. **They represent a draft programme only; they will be taken in draft form for co-development and iteration at the Convention workshops, and confirmed by Northern leaders following the Convention.**

In line with the action-oriented approach of this year's Convention, the range of policy proposals are grouped by potential routes to delivery, whether this is through pan-Northern collaboration between Northern places, through collective advocacy for greater devolution, or through partnership with institutions and the private sector.

1. Trade and Investment

Trade and Investment policy priorities

Over the past decade, the North has fostered collaboration on trade and investment, an ambition that Northern mayors and leaders have strongly reaffirmed. With the evolving political landscape, including new government priorities and increased devolution, the North has an opportunity to organise itself on trade and investment to be greater than the sum of its parts. As new Northern structures for collaboration emerge, agreeing trade and investment functions will enhance coordination and collaboration across the North, leveraging political support and resource to create a robust network that connects key stakeholders. This will foster best practice and align strategic initiatives. We propose the following actions, which consider the key functions of Northern collaboration on trade and investment, the development of a shared plan, and its implementation.

The headline policy priorities listed are from the Manifesto of the North.

Policy Priority 1: Agree Trade and Investment Functions with Northern Regions and Government

The North is essential to the UK's trade and investment success and future growth. Recognising this importance and agreeing areas of Northern collaboration is necessary in unlocking the North's potential.

Proposal 1a: Facilitating Coordination and Collaboration Across the North

In line with political priorities, the T&I Forum of Northern Strategic Authorities will continue to meet regularly and act as a pivotal platform for fostering collaboration, sharing best practice and aligning strategic initiatives across the North. A repurposed Northern T&I Forum can facilitate coordination and collaboration on trade and investment that allows the North to utilise its strategic strengths and address shared challenges.

Leveraging the role of Mayors and Leaders, along with the devolution process, presents an opportunity to bring together diverse stakeholders, coordinate regional efforts, and advocate for the North's interests at the national level.

Proposal 1b: Coordinating Northern Proposals and Propositions with the Government

We will engage with Northern stakeholders to develop a comprehensive and prioritised list of trade and investment proposals and propositions. This collaborative approach should include identifying specific areas where increased devolution and sustained collaboration regionally, pan-regionally and with government could drive growth. Additionally, we will identify barriers to growth and propose solutions that align with both regional aspirations and national priorities.

Proposal 1c: Demonstrating Impact

We will clearly communicate the economic benefits and success stories that trade and investment bring to the region, to build strong support among stakeholders, including businesses, central and regional government, and investors. This could include showcasing the region's achievements in attracting FDI, expanding export markets, and developing key sectors such as advanced manufacturing, digital industries, clean energy, and health

innovation. Recognising that the North is relatively small on a global scale, collaboration in the international arena enhances our influence when marketing to major global economies like India, China, and the US.

Policy Priority 2: A Northern Owned Trade and Investment Plan and Evidence Base

Trade and investment data in the UK faces serious limitations, which is holding back the North's ability to understand and make the most of its own economy. Considering activity at the Northern level also offers the chance to engage with international investors at a compelling scale relative to other opportunities.

Proposal 2a: Developing an Evidence Base

We will review Local Growth Plans to understand the priorities and strategies of different areas, identifying common themes that align with the North's and wider UK's economic priorities. Further sectoral and market priorities will also be analysed, including reviewing economic indicators, industry trends, trade and investment trends and market demand for priority Northern sectors. This will include a matrix to identify areas of overlap among regions, focusing on sub-sectoral areas of work, highlighting opportunities for complementary propositions. It is important however to recognise that not all activity will be cross-boundary and will often be pursued at a sub-regional level.

Proposal 2b: Trade and Investment Plan Development

Outline strategic goals, priorities, and actions based on a robust evidence base. By leveraging data on trade and investment trends, opportunities, and challenges, we can align our activity with the North's economic strengths and potential.

This should include consulting regional representatives, businesses, industry experts, research institutions, and other relevant parties to identify distinct strengths, opportunities, and gather insights and feedback.

To facilitate Northern collaboration, we will consolidate a list of planned annual sub-regional in-market activity, including key events and trade missions. This shared calendar will support appropriate sub-regional collaboration in market and help identify opportunities for joint Northern activity on agreed sectors. We will explore where it is possible to align local, regional, and national outcomes with economic goals.

Proposal 2c: Secure Additional Tools and Resources

To maximise devolution, we should collaborate to identify and secure additional tools and resources for the North, ensuring effective delivery. This includes, but is not limited to:

- **Long-term Funding for Key Account Management:** Secure sustained financial support to maintain and enhance key account management, ensuring stakeholders receive consistent and high-quality assistance.
- **Devolution of Export Support to Regions:** Explore the potential for devolving export support services to regions. This would empower places to provide tailored export advice and support, fostering regional business growth and international trade.
- **Enhance Regional Trade and Investment Data:** Improve the collection and analysis of trade and investment data at a regional/city-region level. This will provide more accurate insights into regional economic performance and help tailor strategies to local needs.

- **Secure Investment Incentives:** Identify, obtain and implement incentives designed to attract new investments into the North. These incentives could include tax breaks, grants, or other financial benefits to make the region more attractive to investors.

Policy Priority 3: Promote Distinctive Northern Specialisms

The North should seek to attract investment and enhance the visibility of its key sectors and specialisms, aiming for national and international recognition. The North can achieve this by working together as a region to develop compelling and complementary propositions to promote the North's world-leading assets and prime capabilities, working in partnership with wider UK regions and helping to deliver national sectoral and industrial policy.

Proposal 3a: Investment Narrative

Build on previous work undertaken on the investment narrative to further develop 'Northern Products' for high-potential sectors and sub-sectors that align with the wider national context, such as those associated with net zero and life sciences. Additionally, identify and align with emerging markets and specialisms that meet the needs of international partners.

Proposal 3b: In-Market Campaign Activation

Identify and attend appropriate flagship events as the North to deliver agreed priorities and promote complimentary specialisms to a wide audience.

This will create a platform for Northern regions to form strategic partnerships with overseas stakeholders, including businesses, industry associations, and government agencies, utilising the influence of mayors and regional leaders.

Proposal 3c: Collaborate with Key Stakeholders

Work with the OFI to develop and jointly market investible propositions for significant, commercially viable opportunities, in order to land key strategic investments. Additionally, leverage the NWF by working closely with Northern regions to identify sectors that are vital for economic development but lack sufficient private investment.

2. Transport

The North's transport infrastructure plays a critical role in addressing regional disparities and unlocking economic potential. Current deficiencies in connectivity hinder productivity, limit access to employment, and reduce the benefits of agglomeration across the North's diverse economic centres. Transforming the region's transport system is essential to fostering inclusive growth, enabling better access to opportunities, and supporting place-based regeneration. Investments in integrated and sustainable transport solutions will not only drive economic growth and reduce inequalities but also contribute to achieving net zero ambitions, ensuring the North leads in creating greener, healthier, and more prosperous communities.

The headline policy priorities listed are from the Manifesto of the North.

Policy priority 1: Devolving Local Transport Powers and Tools to Raise Funding

Increased devolution of transport funding and revenue powers is essential to bring budget decisions closer to Northern communities, with expanded control over local bus services and streamlined franchising powers to enable greater regional flexibility and efficiency.

Proposal 1a: Capacity and Best Practice Sharing on Buses

Through the pan-Northern Bus Forum, convened by Transport for the North (TfN), collaborating and sharing best practice between authorities wanting to take greater control over local bus services, and sharing innovative solutions for rural bus services.

Proposal 1b: Devolution Advocacy

Influencing the Comprehensive Spending Review to pave the way for expanded devolution in the North.

Proposal 1c: Review Private Investment Mechanisms

Identifying the opportunities that greater control over local transport might give authorities, particularly those with fully devolved transport budgets, to attract private investment in transport, such as funding and financing mechanisms.

Proposal 1d: National Bus Fare Cap Advocacy

Supporting the Department for Transport (DfT) with evidence and advocacy to maintain the national single bus fare cap scheme beyond the end of 2025.

Policy priority 2: Transforming Northern Connectivity

Delivering Northern Powerhouse Rail in full, developing viable alternatives to HS2 Phase 2, and supporting sustainable growth for the North's international gateways is vital for economic and social connectivity across the North, nationally and globally.

Proposal 2a: Informing Rail Investment Needs

Using TfN's Rail State of Play – a single overview of planned and proposed rail infrastructure schemes, rolling stock introductions and service changes across the North up to 2050 – to inform investment needs, including Task Force Boards and Place-Based Groups to convene partners to address long-standing bottlenecks and unlock opportunities at pan-regionally significant rail hubs, and the development of Network Outputs to 2050

Proposal 2b: Rail Service Improvements

Collaborating with the Rail North Partnership to develop the 10-year Outline Passenger Service Specifications for Northern and TransPennine Express, with the user at the heart of the service specification

Proposal 2c: Northern Powerhouse Rail Advocacy

Influencing the NPR Co-Sponsorship Agreement with DfT to strengthen the voice of Northern partners in NPR development.

Proposal 2d: Extending rail devolution to the North through rail reform

Working with Northern partners to extend and deepen rail devolution arrangements in the North through the opportunities arising from rail reform, ensuring that Strategic Authorities have a deep partnership with GBR and the railway is integrated with wider public transport networks.

Proposal 2e: Enhancing International Connectivity

Enhancing the North's international connectivity for people and goods by supporting the North's ports and airports with improved surface connectivity and unlocking opportunities for sustainable development, including the development of sustainable fuels.

Proposal 2f: Unlocking Capacity for Rail Freight

Supporting freight operators to move more freight by rail through the Northern freight network, identifying the requirements for improved rail freight capacity, including gauge clearances, electrification, and greater control over path allocation and timetabling processes.

Policy priority 3: Inclusive Growth through a Northern Appraisal Playbook

The North is working collaboratively to develop a Northern Appraisal Playbook that better captures the full range of social, economic, and environmental outcomes from transport investment compared to traditional transport appraisal. This strategic approach aims to maximise the transformative impact of transport investments on inclusive growth in the North.

Proposal 3a: Sharing Best Practice to Strengthen Business Cases with the Northern Appraisal Playbook

Collaborating to share advice and best practice for using the Northern Appraisal Playbook to make the most of our evidence and the flexibilities of the Green Book and Transport Analysis Guidance (TAG) to strengthen business cases. The Playbook will enable business cases for investment to fully capture social and environmental benefits of transport investment, reflecting transport's critical role in improving social inclusion and in delivering the net zero transition.

Proposal 3b: Delivering New Evidence to Support Appraisal Reform

Collaborating to deliver new evidence to support improvements to appraisal, for example on Northern-specific inputs to appraisal, such as North-specific 'values of time', or improved valuation of resilience and reliability benefits of transport schemes.

Proposal 3c: Locally Tailored Appraisal Frameworks

Where appropriate, supporting authorities with devolved transport budgets to make the case for their own appraisal framework(s) for transport business cases.

Proposal 3d: Advocacy for Appraisal-Reform

Following Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement of the planned review of the Green Book and how it is being used to provide advice on public investment across the country, the North will continue to engage with Treasury and with DfT's Transport Appraisal and Strategic Modelling (TASM) team to secure positive engagement with the Northern Appraisal Playbook and support further appraisal reform to better capture the economic, social and environmental benefits of transport investment.

3. Place and Culture

Place and Culture policy priorities

The Place and Culture theme and its policy priorities directly build on the People and Place theme from the 2024 Convention. It reflects a refined focus on the North's unique cultural and heritage assets as critical levers for economic growth, community wellbeing, and sustainable development. This year's approach prioritises practical collaboration across creative industries, green jobs, and the visitor economy to address shared challenges and maximise the potential of these sectors. By linking these efforts with national priorities, the North aims to strengthen its position as a hub for inclusive and place-based growth.

Policy Priority 1: Fuelling Growth in Northern Creative and Place-focused sectors

The 2024 Convention proposed establishing a Northern Creative supercluster corridor, unlocking finance, attracting and retaining talent, and capturing national attention.

One Creative North is a pan-regional initiative that aims to unleash the potential of the Creative Industries in the North. It will address three barriers to growth: access to finance, skills, and connectivity. Jude Kelly CBE has been commissioned to develop the proposal into a report and investable proposition in May 2025.

Pan-Northern partnership work across combined authorities, sector bodies and universities is developing related variety 'Place Clusters' across Northern towns, rural and coastal communities.

One Creative North is a pan-regional approach to unleashing the potential of the creative industries with three central pillars with the potential to benefit the whole region:

- Access to finance, suited to subsector and business life cycles
- A coordinated approach to life-long skills training for the creative industries
- Greater connectivity, visibility and access to opportunity across the creative industries.

Jude Kelly CBE has been commissioned to undertake a six-month scoping exercise, hosted by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and supported by the BBC. In May 2025 the results of this work will be shared including:

- Proposed mechanism and partner(s) for access to finance and funder(s) identified
- Proposals for creative industries skills training initiatives, taking advantage of the increased flexibility anticipated with devolution, meeting the fast-changing needs of the creative industries sector and its workforce
- Proposals for growing the connectivity and visibility of the creative industries sector.
- Recommendation for the future management of One Creative North
- Proposed three-year work plan

One Creative North is the jewel in the crown in terms of pan-Northern efforts to 'link up, tool up and skill up' the North's Place Sectors. Alongside the targeted opportunity around the

commercial creative industries, there is clear potential to connect sector support, workforce and leadership development and investment-readiness support when working *across* sectors defined by place. These 'Place Sectors' include:

- Creative and cultural industries, focusing on content creation and presentation
- Heritage, including conservation construction and traditional heritage craft
- Green, landscape and nature jobs
- Visitor economy professions, including festivals and public events
- Artisan food and beverage production celebrating heritage and place

There are synergies and similar characteristics across these sectors. Drawing on the NP11's February 2024 'Innovation Clusters' report, the North presents opportunities to build and support related variety clusters and career development, offering a new paradigm for economic development and supporting Place Sector businesses across towns, rural and coastal communities across Northern England.

Convening, connecting and pursuing funding for collaborative work across these Northern Place sectors – supporting focused groups such as Nature North, Screen Alliance North, Museum Development North and the LVEP network – is a core focus for the Northern Place and Culture Partnership with an equal delivery focus on inclusive growth and tangible public benefit.

Proposal 1a: Universities and Sector Partnerships Research Programme

Co-develop and support pan-Northern research programmes with universities and sector partnerships to support creative and place cluster development in Northern towns, rural and coastal communities.

Proposal 1b: Northern Workforce Development

Co-develop and deliver a Northern workforce development programme, supporting innovation and growth in related variety 'place clusters'.

Proposal 1c: Deepen Collaboration Between Creative and Place Stakeholders

Deepen work with and between the Creative Policy and Evidence Centre, the N8, Yorkshire Universities, North East Universities, and the Key Cities Innovation Network to maximise creative and place sector research, knowledge exchange and innovation opportunities.

Policy Priority 2: Connecting the North's Place-Based Visitor Economy

The North of England is the UK's most advanced area for LVEP coverage in the UK. As the pilot organisation, the North East's Destination Development Partnership (DDP) is the only entity to draw funding to support its connective work.

Building on Visit England's new 2025 Strategy, pan-Northern collaboration will strive for pan-Northern roll-out of DDPs with a mandate around developing/delivering a regenerative tourism programme by 2027 and doubling international visits to the North by 2030.

Together, Northern LVEPs, DDPs, and combined authorities can transform the role and positive impact a connected Northern visitor economy can, and will, play within wider place strategy ambitions.

The success of the visitor economy in the North is intrinsically linked to the place sectors of arts, culture, heritage and nature, and this relationship is mutually reinforcing. Since the pandemic, the policy and partnership landscape supporting the visitor economy has significantly matured. In 2022, VisitEngland established a portfolio of nationally supported, strategic, and high-performing LVEPs. The North stands as the UK's most advanced region for Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) coverage. As VisitEngland prepares to launch its 2025-2030 strategy, the North is well-positioned to align with, enhance, and amplify this national vision across the region.

As the pilot organisation, the North East's Destination Development Pilot (DDP) is the only entity to draw funding to support its connective work. In 2024, they launched an ambitious Regenerative Tourism framework, which serves as a blueprint and roadmap for other LVEPs and pan-Northern ambitions.

Visit England is a member of the Northern Place and Culture Partnership and its work across the place sectors since the 2024 Convention have borne out clear opportunities for pan-Northern collaboration and impact. Northern LVEPs are in regular dialogue and are collaborative on shared aspirations and initiatives. As strong Northern leaders, they are positioned to maximise inclusive growth and the North's international brand. Recent dialogue with Screen Alliance North sparked interest in a growing trend for 'set jetting', underlining the growing appetite for visitor experiences at filming locations for international film, television and music videos, encompassing both iconic and recent screen productions.

Proposal 2a: Regenerative Tourism

Support pan-Northern development of the North East's Regenerative Tourism framework with Nature North, driving an actionable framework for pan-Northern scale up.

Proposal 2b: Inward Investment in Screen and Music Tourism

Develop clear proposals for work between Northern LVEPs, Screen Alliance North and strategic pan-Northern music programmes to explore potential for both inward investment in Screen Sectors and a cohesive 'set jetting' offer for visitors.

Proposal 2c: DDP Coverage

Support Visit England and LVEP leads to co-develop proposals for full DDP coverage across Northern England, building on the North East DDP's learning and delivery.

Policy Priority 3: Cultivating Quality of Life Through Pride in Place-Led Growth and Green and Creative Care

Across population health, creative education, access to nature, community cohesion and pride in place, there are shared aims around the quality of life experienced by Northerners across age groups and geographic locales. Pan-Northern work to cultivate quality of life would include:

- Development and piloting of 'Pride in Place'-led models for regenerative and hyperlocal growth
- A Green and Creative Health pilot initiative in Northern secondary schools, embedding long-term research and co-creation to develop and scale good practice
- Co-develop, support and secure resource for a pan-Northern 'Pride in Place and Storytelling' programme.

Across policy interventions in population health, creative education, access to nature, community cohesion and pride in place, there are shared aims around the quality of life experienced by Northerners – across age groups and geographic locales. Quality of life shifts the focus back to people, but in ways that consider the genuine links between place, culture and the potential for these links to make 'life worth living'.

As a policy frame, quality of life also aligns with the policy shift to preventative measures and public health. Rather than aiming to not be sick, digging into initiatives that surround healing, pride, and celebration offer new focus points for collaborative, pan-Northern working. This asset-based approach also aligns with a series of the Government's new missions.

There is an additional shift, bringing established practice in creative health and green social prescribing into a collaborative model of green and creative care. This term builds useful bridges for health professionals who report that green care and creative health can feel like competing measures. It shifts the potential for creativity to encompass interventions in the arts, heritage, and everyday creativity.

The three policy propositions ideas below build on extensive good practice and trailblazing leadership across the North. They seek to bring something distinct, rather than duplicating emerging activity, partnerships or models.

Proposal 3a: Pride in Place Models for Regeneration and Growth

A number of place-based models are aiming to regenerate a place and spur economic growth. BIDs are the most established model, but there have been recent innovations focusing on culture/community/creative-led regeneration: Creative Improvement Districts (GMCA), Cultural and Creative Zones (in the former North of Tyne Combined Authority), Creative Enterprise Zones (GLA), Community Improvement Districts, among others. With a dual lens of green and creative care and quality of life, the aim would be to devise a 'white label model' to test with willing Northern place partners, 'skinned' with their own place

branding but with a common skeleton of policy and development toolkits, datasets, and impact matrices. New models will draw from exemplar Creative People and Places Programmes, part of Arts Council England's long-standing strategic investment in place.

Proposal 3b: Green and Creative Health Pilot in Northern Secondary Schools

Building on the policy proposition for 2024 Convention for the North, we aim to build a 3-year pilot and 5-year wrap-around research programme to embed green and creative care with school counselling measures. The crises of resource-deficient schools, [urgent support for young people's mental health](#), and extreme resource shortage for SEN students has informed this workstream. The evidence base for green care and creative health is compelling. This pilot initiative, working with Northern universities, would explore how to embed into the secondary schools' structure in response to all three.

Proposal 3c: Storytelling and Pride in Place Initiative

Northern writers, literature festivals, writing agencies, major and indie publishers, Writing Centres, and world-leading writing schools have thrived in the North. This initiative would anchor the cultural and creative industries to existing infrastructure, fostering a wealth of place- and community-based co-created storytelling across various mediums, such as the written word, spoken word, film, radio, murals, zines, and online content. Parks, public green spaces, libraries, and heritage buildings would serve as the infrastructure for place-focused activities, placemaking, and the stories themselves. The pilot initiative would be developed in close collaboration with Directors of Public Health across the North and Health Equity North.

4. Innovation

Innovation policy priorities

As a new theme, Innovation was discussed at the Mayors and Leaders' Summit in September, and from this, as well as existing research and publications, we have drawn several potential policy priorities to provide the basis for a discussion on the most appropriate and effective pan-regional activities.

The North has significant potential to grow its innovation ecosystem, contributing to national economic growth while addressing regional disparities. It boasts a diverse range of assets, including six of the UK's eight national Investment Zones, a strong network of leading universities, and globally competitive clusters in advanced manufacturing, digital, energy, and health innovation. By fostering collaboration across administrative and sectoral boundaries and building on the priorities of the Manifesto for the North, the region can strengthen its position as a key driver of innovation.

There has been increasing acknowledgement at the national level of the importance of place-based innovation policy to promote innovation clusters and within that, the role of local institutions in fostering more innovation. This recognises that innovation clusters require tailored packages of support at different stages of development and that supporting emerging, as well as existing clusters, is crucial to the objectives of reducing regional inequality.

Within this theme we aim to collaborate across administrative boundaries in the North to increase the speed and reach of cluster growth by integrating innovation policy into devolution policy to allow local leaders, academia, and business to link up to local priorities.

Policy Priority 1: Boost Public and Private R&D Investment Through Cluster Growth

Advocate for and deliver increased public investment of UK public R&D funding in the North to match our growing private sector R&D, by linking a cluster development approach to devolution policy. This will support productivity across the North and help to deliver the Government's Industrial Strategy and Missions for the UK.

Proposal 1a: Devolution of Innovation Support

Building on the Government's English Devolution White Paper, collectively advocate for devolution of innovation support programmes linked to the single pot settlement for Strategic Authorities to create a more holistic and tailored approach to supporting innovation clusters. This should combine different forms of policy support such as direct R&D funding, business support programmes, planning and infrastructure, education, and skills to build an integrated environment for clusters to grow.

Policy Priority 2: Support Business Innovation

Build a more holistic, long-term support package for the North's businesses that targets both cutting edge innovation and adoption and diffusion of innovation, including mechanisms for early market finance for startups and young businesses in the North. We aim to provide long-term consistent funding and flexible funding pots to accelerate cluster growth and send a positive signal to businesses and the investment community on the opportunities in the North.

Proposal 2a: Diffusion of Technology

Collective prioritisation and a campaign on addressing the adoption and diffusion of technology, and innovation business efficiency across the North's businesses to increase productivity, working with Innovate UK to deliver programmes in local contexts.

Proposal 2b: Early Market Finance

A pan-Northern approach to creating more early market finance options for startups and young businesses to set up in the North, working with our universities, commercial finance bodies and business services providers to create an environment that retains spinouts in the North.

Policy Priority 3: Increasing Innovation Capacity through Collaboration

Incentivise and promote working across administrative boundaries with cross-regional collaboration opportunities among Northern places, universities, businesses, Metro Mayors, and council leaders, both in delivering innovation support programmes and also sharing data, best practice and learning.

Proposal 3a: Innovation T&I Programme

A co-ordinated programme specifically promoting the North's innovation strengths for trade and investment linked to the North's universities and research institutes, supported by national Government.

Proposal 3b: Northern Innovation Policy Network

Building on the work of the NP11 Innovation Leads network and the Northern Evidence Network, the creation of a Northern policy network to be at the cutting edge of trialling, evaluating and sharing learning on innovative ways to solve big challenges such as mission-led approaches, real time data feedback and evidence collection.

5. Net Zero

Net Zero policy priorities

The Net Zero theme for the Convention focuses on the critical role the North can play in advancing the UK's transition to a sustainable and low-carbon economy. The region's natural and industrial assets, along with its innovation capabilities, position it as a leader in delivering solutions to the climate crisis. At the same time, the North faces distinct challenges, such as an ageing housing stock, car-dependent transport systems, and emissions-intensive industries. By building on its existing strengths and fostering collaboration across local authorities, businesses, and research institutions, the North has the potential to drive forward decarbonisation, promote sustainable economic growth, and address regional inequalities.

The headline policy priorities listed are from the Manifesto for the North.

Policy Priority 1: Developing Northern Emerging Opportunities for Low-Carbon Energy Generation

The North and Government should collaborate to harness the region's emerging opportunities to generate energy from renewable sources, providing dedicated revenue support to build a globally competitive pipeline of investable projects which span the North's administrative boundaries.

Proposal 1a: Collaborate to Enable Investment at Scale

Building on previous work, Northern partners should continue to identify opportunities to develop packages of interventions and investments which, when delivered at scale, deliver greater strategic benefit and stronger commercial return than when acting in isolation. This could include developing technology-specific investment packages – for example, around Hydrogen, Nuclear, SAF, or CCUS – cross-boundary infrastructure investments, and enabling investment in low/zero carbon housing and retrofit at scale and nature-based solutions. The North also has opportunities to lead on the engineered removal of CO₂, deploying technologies such as BioEnergy with CCS. Net Zero Hubs, Combined Authorities and Local Authorities all have a role to play in this alongside the private sector. Greater Manchester's Net Zero Accelerator is an example of how a pipeline of net zero projects is being developed, with £12bn of public investment unlocking £52bn of private investment.

Proposal 1b: Develop a Net Zero Investment Prospectus

Aligning with the recommendations of the Trade and Investment workstream and building on existing pan-Northern collaboration on trade and investment, a Net Zero Investment Prospectus will promote local and regional investment opportunities to global investors. By leveraging the scale of the North and the increased profile and collaboration that arises from mayoral devolution, the North can increase its profile and potential as a destination for investment in net zero projects, as evidenced by international investment in the Great North Bog which demonstrates the potential to invest in nature at scale. This should also leverage our existing assets, including ports, Freeports and Investment Zones, and natural capital as mechanisms to attract investment.

Proposal 1c: Leverage Spatial Planning's Role in Delivering Net Zero

Northern partners should work to embed principles of sustainable development into local strategies. Co-location of essential services such as schools, healthcare, and retail can reduce dependency on cars, lowering transport emissions and supporting more liveable communities. Planning policies must require walkability, access to public transport, and green housing and infrastructure to align with net zero ambitions. The English Devolution White Paper and Planning & Infrastructure Bill also give devolved areas greater influence over spatial development and Local Nature Recovery Strategies, providing an opportunity to increase the role planning can play in supporting climate resilience.

Proposal 1d: Scale Up Heat Networks

Heat networks offer a sustainable solution for heating communities where heat demand density aligns. The North has led the way on leveraging mine water for district heating in places such as Gateshead and has the opportunity to do the same in extracting geothermal energy from former mining sites. Mapping opportunities for utilising waste heat from industrial processes or data centres can create efficient district heating systems. This approach requires collaboration across local authorities, businesses, and energy companies to identify and implement viable projects at scale.

Policy Priority 2: Tackling Energy Grid Constraints Through Regional Planning

Addressing grid limitations through regional planning is crucial for economic growth and energy security. Proposals include developing Local Area Energy Plans and aligning resources to support the infrastructure needs of the North's energy initiatives. Through such initiatives, we can position the North as a net exporter of green energy and leverage our strengths in this space to attract new industry to the North.

Proposal 2a: Expand the Rollout of Local Area Energy Plans to Cover the Whole of the North

Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs) play a crucial and growing role in developing evidence-based, cost-effective local plans for delivering the transition to clean energy. The North has been at the forefront of this, with plans already in place in Greater Manchester and York and North Yorkshire. However, there is much to do before all parts of the North are at the same stage. There is scope for Net Zero Hubs to act as facilitators and drivers of best practice to support the ambition for full adoption of LAEPs or similar approaches to energy planning across the North.

Proposal 2b: Develop a Coordinated Approach to Local and Regional Energy Infrastructure Through Regional Energy Strategic Plans

Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESPs) present an opportunity for partners in local authorities, combined authorities, and other regional institutions to develop more place-based approaches to ensuring energy infrastructure meets current and future demand. This is a key opportunity for the North, which has the lowest levels of carbon intensity from energy generation in the UK. With an increased focus on the importance of secure access to low-carbon energy for energy intensive industries such as data centres, the North has an opportunity to further develop its low-carbon grid and leverage this to attract investment.

To fully realise this opportunity, access to reliable, consistent data on energy consumption and distribution is vital. We will work across the North and with national partners to push for a consistent methodology for assessing demand and consistent access to data to ensure all parts of the North can make informed contributions to the RESP process.

Proposal 2c: Work with Government to Drive Grid Improvements and Reduce Delays in Connections

Linked to the above, and recognising RESPs reflect political, rather than network boundaries, it is also important for Northern partners to collaborate in developing regional asks of the transmission and distribution networks. This will require close collaboration with Distribution System Operators (DSOs) to ensure that plans for grid development are based on accurate plans, data and projections. Northern partners will also work closely with national government and other partners to deliver on the Government's commitment in the Autumn Budget to accelerate grid connections and new infrastructure. There is also potential to share data on the scale of this challenge across the North to develop co-ordinated asks and solutions.

Policy Priority 3: Leveraging Natural Capital to Support Climate Resilience and Decarbonisation

The North has a key opportunity to lead in sustainable development through initiatives like Nature North, attracting international investment in natural capital and nature-based solutions. To support this, the government should work with the North to streamline policies, optimise public funding for collaborative projects that leverage private investment, and build capacity through green skills and job training.

Proposal 3a: Develop Early-Stage Investment Routes

Natural capital projects often struggle to secure funding at the early stages due to perceived risks. Establishing mechanisms to fund early-stage investment and business case development can help demonstrate viability and derisk investment, building on approaches such as the Revenue Certainty Mechanisms which have proved successful in wind and solar industries. This in turn will serve to unlock greater private sector investment, accelerating the transition to sustainable land use and conservation practices.

Proposal 3b: Build Place-Based Carbon Markets

Carbon markets tailored to regional strengths can incentivise emissions reductions and create new revenue streams for local communities. For example, woodland creation, peatland restoration, or renewable energy projects could be supported through localised schemes. The North East's planned Carbon and Nature Marketplace, due to launch in March 2025, provides a blueprint for expanding these initiatives across the North, whilst similar approaches have been applied successfully at a regional level, for example in relation to the Great North Bog. By collaborating at different scales we can increase visibility, amplify and support our investment opportunities.



Proposal 3c: Recognise Water and Nature as Climate Resilience and Decarbonisation Assets

Nature plays a pivotal role in climate resilience, from managing flood risks to supporting future resource needs and the climate resilience of net zero investment assets. The Greater Manchester Integrated Water Management Plan created the first partnership aimed at progressively improving sustainable water management, enhancing the natural environment and ensuring future developments are climate and flood resilient. Approaches such as these can reduce vulnerability to climate change impacts and enable industrial clusters to decarbonise while unlocking economic benefits. At a regional level, Nature North's Green Northern Connections proposition demonstrates how nature-based solutions focused on nationally significant infrastructure can enhance the resilience of the North's Industrial Clusters.

Proposal 3d: Share Best Practices Across Regions

Developing a robust network for knowledge sharing can help Northern communities learn from each other's successes and challenges in implementing natural capital initiatives. This could include hosting regional workshops, creating online repositories of case studies, and facilitating mentoring between local authorities. Such mechanisms can ensure innovations are scaled efficiently and equitably.

Next steps

The Convention itself will take place on the 27th and 28th of February in Preston. On the first day of the Convention, there will be a series of workshops, focusing on the potential scope of developing a programme of pan-Northern policy collaboration, partnerships and shared advocacy within each of the policy areas.

Delivering the Gamechangers

This paper has set out some headline propositions, or 'gamechangers'. If we are to deliver all or even one of the gamechangers, each would need three key features to be implemented:

- **Northern Mayoral sponsorship.** The support and convening powers of Northern Mayors and leaders will be essential in progressing each gamechanger. This could be done collectively via the Great North and the Convention Steering Group, or potentially through named individual champions for Gamechangers.
- **Government backing.** The Gamechangers have been written, distinct from our wider pan-Northern programme of policy development, to provide an opportunity to work with Government specifically on national growth priorities. This could take the form of endorsement, partnerships with national departments and arms-lengths agencies, and financial backing for key investment opportunities; the Convention is a key opportunity to secure this support.
- **Organisational delivery capacity.** The North already has a strong and varied base of policy delivery capacity, including the emerging Great North partnership; defined organisational responsibilities (and matching resourcing) for each gamechanger proposition will be essential in maintaining momentum.

With each component in place, we will be able to move beyond high-level propositions into tangible impacts for Northern people, businesses and communities.

Beyond Convention 2025

Through and beyond the Convention, the North will continue to work together with each other and with Government to deepen partnerships. We will also work to support the deepening and broadening of devolution, bringing more powers, funding and decision-making to places across the North.

In early 2026, Convention partners will reconvene to assess progress against the delivery priorities identified this year.

Annex I: The Convention Steering Group

The 2025 Convention of the North has been overseen by the Convention Steering Group, made up of Leaders, Mayors and heads of pan-Northern organisations:

COTN 25 Steering Group	Role
Phillippa Williamson	Leader, Lancashire County Council, Convention Co-Chair
Clare Hayward	Chair, NP11, Convention Co-Chair
Tracy Brabin	Mayor, West Yorkshire
Andy Burnham	Mayor, Greater Manchester
Steve Rotherham	Mayor, Liverpool City Region
Oliver Coppard	Mayor, South Yorkshire
Kim McGuinness	Mayor, North East
David Skaith	Mayor, North Yorkshire
Ben Houchen	Mayor, Tees Valley
Carl Les	Leader, North Yorkshire Council
Stephen Houghton	Leader, Barnsley Council
Chris Cooke	Mayor, Middlesbrough Council
Tom Hunt	Leader, Sheffield City Council
John Merry	Deputy Mayor, Salford City Council
Liam Robinson	Leader, Liverpool City Council
Karen Kilgour	Leader, Newcastle City Council
Claire Douglas	Leader, City of York Council
Amanda Hopgood	Leader, Durham County Council
Bev Craig	Leader, Manchester City Council
Susan Hinchcliffe	Leader, Bradford Council
Mike Ross	Leader, Hull City Council
James Lewis	Leader, Leeds City Council
Jonathan Brook	Leader, Westmorland and Furness Council
Henri Murison	Chief Executive, Northern Powerhouse Partnership
Edna Robinson	The Big Life Group
Patrick McLoughlin	Chair, Transport for the North
Martin Tugwell	Chair, People's Powerhouse
Charlie Jeffery	Chair, N8 Research Partnership






The Convention policy development process was supported by Metro Dynamics, who worked with the pan-Northern Convention Policy Officers group on the development of the policy programme, and the overarching paper.

Annex II: Gamechangers Overview

The scale of opportunity for the North is highlighted by the 2023 refresh of the [Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review](#), which reviewed the potential to boost long-term growth in the North across four policy and investment levers: investing in **technology and innovation**, improving **infrastructure and development supply**, investing in **Net Zero**, and investing in **skills, health and prevention** as part of an inclusive productivity programme. Extensive modelling shows that if all these investment levers were taken together, the outcome is a transformational scenario for the North, **growing the economy by an additional £118bn a year by 2050**.

There is a key opportunity to galvanise the ongoing delivery and partnership across the North with a few targeted investment opportunities. These ‘gamechangers’ are set out below. Four of these gamechangers are closely linked with the NPIER scenarios, while the fifth gamechanger builds on the strength of existing Northern collaboration and partnerships

Our Gamechanger Propositions

	<p>Connecting the North through a transformed rail system, by completing the delivery of the Transpennine Route Upgrade, delivering Northern Powerhouse Rail as a co-ordinated programme of investment with benefits all the way across the North, and securing improved capacity and connectivity increases north of Birmingham.</p>
	<p>Making the North a global leader in Clean Energy investment, by co-development of a Net Zero Trade and Investment Prospectus with Government, co-investment with GB Energy in key Northern energy opportunities, and building a Clean Energy market that works for Northern businesses and people by rolling out locational pricing.</p>
	<p>Creating a Northern cluster of AI excellence, by co-ordinating partners for simplified points of entry for inward investment, developing new skills and upskilling the existing workforce through Northern universities, working in triple helix partnerships to embed AI usage in industry, and deepening collaboration between our research centres to form a region-wide cluster of excellence.</p>
	<p>Combining cutting edge Northern research with place-based prevention of ill-health to drive growth and reform, by establishing the NSHA Institute for Preventative Health Research in the North, and enabling Strategic Authorities to pioneer new integrated approaches to employment support, housing and health through further devolution.</p>
	<p>Investing in the North’s Place, Cultural and Natural assets, by co-investment in the Place and Culture North Initiative, delivering the Investing in Nature for the North proposition, and supporting the jewel-in-the-crown One Creative North initiative.</p>

Connecting the North through a transformed rail system

Transforming rail connectivity between the North's great cities and towns is fundamental to unlocking the North's full potential. Investment in infrastructure and services that connect people and businesses with markets and services is key to realising an additional £118bn GVA per annum by 2050. It's why the delivery of the Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) network – in full – in addition to completing delivery of Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU) are at the heart of our transport ask.

The Government's upcoming Spending Review and 10-year infrastructure pipeline need to commit the funds needed to complete delivery of TRU, which will enable faster, greener, and more reliable journeys across the Pennines as well as unlocking opportunities for rail freight. They also need to make a long-term commitment to fund delivery of NPR as a co-ordinated programme of investment. And there remains a need to bring forward solutions that deliver the same levels of increased connectivity and capacity that would have come from High Speed 2 (HS2) Phase 2a and 2b to link key economic centres inside and outside the North, for both passengers and freight.

Making the North a global leader in Clean Energy investment

The North has a unique opportunity to become a global leader in low-carbon power generation, lowering prices for consumers, spurring exports and the development of associated supply chains. As recent [modelling has set out, for every £1 invested by Strategic Authorities and GB Energy in renewable energy projects, we can secure over £2.65 in private investment](#). Promoting investment in renewables, innovative energy solutions and supporting businesses transition to low-carbon alternatives can help the region achieve net-zero faster and more cost-effectively, through interlinked work strands:

- **Co-development of a Net Zero Trade and Investment prospectus.** By working together, the relatively small regions of the North can amplify their impact on the international stage and consolidate its position in the global market in tradeable Net Zero services and technologies. With the right support from Government, we can increase the national and international visibility of the North's unique clean growth opportunities, increasing the number of net zero investment leads and attracting more Net Zero FDI into the North.
- **Co-investment with GB Energy in key Northern energy opportunities.** We need to see Northern Local Energy Action Plans backed up by GB Energy's co-investment with Strategic Authorities alongside private sector finance in key Northern investable propositions. Emerging technologies, such as tidal and geothermal, floating wind, Small Modular Reactors, CCUS and hydrogen, have huge potential and will require early intervention to be viable in the long-term, just as offshore wind did. There is an opportunity to catalyse export opportunities from SMR and other technologies as well as domestic supply chains; Great British Nuclear must deliver maximum value across the North, not only using licensed sites where there is existing consent, but also through fuel sourcing.
- **A Clean Energy market that works for Northern businesses and people, by rolling out locational pricing.** Locational pricing will cut prices for every part of the UK, but here in the North it will make us more competitive to incentivise not only data centres but wider industrial high energy users like electric arc furnaces for UK steelmaking.

Creating a Northern cluster of AI excellence

The North of England is ideally placed to be at the vanguard of the AI revolution, because of its resources, clean energy capacity, infrastructure, research strengths and capabilities, and the 10,000 people already working in Northern AI firms, and because the North is committed to collaboration on a pan-regional scale. By taking a coordinated approach to AI Growth Zones and other economic opportunities we can create a region where local investments are synergistic across the entirety of the North through four interlinked strands of work;

- **Infrastructure.** The North has readily available lower cost land, with excellent connectivity to clean energy technologies, so by working with LAs/MCAs, inward investment agencies and the Office for Investment we will provide simplified points of entry for investors seeking opportunities for inward investment, be it in data centres, business innovation or other AI assets.
- **New Skills.** We will support development of AI content for levels 4, 5, and 6 courses and train staff to deliver it ensuring that all learners even those not enrolled in a course that specifically needs AI, have a strong base understanding of the opportunities in working with AI. We can also work to upskill the existing workforce (either through courses in the New Skills portion or through bespoke designs), providing Knowledge Exchange and staff mobility opportunities, or collaborative R&D.
- **AI for safe economic growth.** We will work through LA/CAs with businesses, FE and HE to identify solutions for embedding AI usage in industry. And drawing on world-leading Northern assets, we will give public and private sector the confidence to procure and roll out AI technology (at the frontier and with more conventional products).
- **Cutting Edge AI.** Collaboration will support our individual strengths but also create a cluster of excellence across the region – led by the research-intensive universities of the N8 Research Partnership but including others – that supports and delivers cutting edge research, both in fundamental AI and industry-led applied research.

Combining cutting edge Northern research with place-based prevention of ill-health to drive growth and reform

Combine cutting edge research with place-based prevention – establish the NHS Institute for Preventative Research in the North, and enable Strategic Authorities to pioneer new integrated approaches to employment support, housing and health through further devolution:

- **Establish the NHS Institute for Preventative Health Research in the North.** The North suffers from disproportionately poor health; [a third of the productivity gap between the North and the South is due to worse health](#) in the North, costing £13.2bn a year. We need a mechanism to close the funding gap and identify and tackle the key issues putting pressure on the NHS and undermining the UK's productivity. We support the establishment of a national Institute for Preventative Health Research, as proposed by the Northern Health Science Alliance, based in the North of England. The Institute will bring together health research expertise in prevention across the North, building on pan-regional areas of excellence to develop delivery infrastructure and collaborations with industry, third sector and other stakeholders.
- **Accelerate devolution of employment support to improve health outcomes.** There is an opportunity to reap the devolution dividend, by shifting to a focus on

prevention at scale, to increase the numbers of people in work, reduce health inequalities and drive UK-wide growth, as a core component of a new “Northern Growth Model” and a “Total Place 2.0” approach. This can be achieved through the deepened, widened and accelerated rollout of the integrated settlement model across the North’s existing and emerging devolved institutions, with full devolution of employment support. The reformed integrated settlement model should enable total place style collaboration between public services including employment and skills support, closely aligned with parallel and place-based health and housing interventions.

Investing in the North’s Place, Cultural and Natural assets

Across the North, inspiring schemes to grow the creative industries, celebrate our vibrant cultural and visitor economy offer, and lead landscape-scale nature recovery, have all taken root and flourished. The North is uniquely positioned to make progress in this field through our extensive natural capital assets, our advanced state of devolution that provides powers and leadership, our existing pan-regional structures and partnerships, and a strong foundation of innovation and skills across our region. We propose building on this base through two interlinked initiatives:

- **Place and Culture North 2025-2030, aligned with One Creative North.** This Northern Place and Culture Partnership-led initiative, developed with all Northern Strategic Authorities and key sector partnerships, spans extensive research and innovation 24 programmes, pan-Northern regenerative tourism initiatives, Pride in Place regeneration schemes, and workforce and leadership development programmes connecting our ‘Place Sectors’. It will work with the new One Creative North initiative targeting finance, skills and connectivity for the North’s Creative Industries. With the right co-investment in resource from Government, we can build on the sector’s existing £16.6 billion direct annual contribution to the Northern economy to achieve game-changing economic, social and environmental impact, both in and across our region.
- **Investing in Nature for the North.** Developed by the Nature North Partnership – developed with significant investment from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Esmee Fairbairn and input from over 400 people from across local government, government agencies, NGOs, investors, communities and businesses - Investing in Nature for the North sets out the pathway for achieving this goal through actionable proposals and examples of transformative investment. It outlines the opportunities for the North of driving investment to increase the scale and speed of nature recovery, and the significant benefits this will bring for the economy, climate resilience, people and places.